

**The Honorable Adrian Smith
Member of Congress
December 10, 2014**

**“The Impact on Local Communities of the Release of
Unaccompanied Minors and the Need for Consultation and
Notification”**

Testimony of the Honorable Adrian Smith
Prepared for the House Judiciary Subcommittee on
Immigration and Border Security

Good afternoon Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Lofgren, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing on immigration and the need for state notification of unaccompanied minors.

As you all are very much aware, the situation at our southern border is extremely dire. Every year, thousands of illegal immigrants are able to cross our border and settle in the United States.

I have heard from many Nebraskans concerned by the growing crisis at our southern border. The problem of illegal immigration is nothing new, but this year the surge of tens of thousands of unaccompanied children mostly from Central America crossing into our country has further strained our communities' resources.

Families in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador are sending their children alone to the United States because they believe they will have greater opportunities here. They are also being encouraged by the belief children will be allowed to stay in the United States if they make it across the border – even if they are undocumented. The President's choice to not enforce certain immigration laws has only made this problem worse.

We need to address this issue not only to protect our national security and sovereignty, but also to protect the children being sent here. The border between the U.S. and Mexico is increasingly violent as rival drug cartels fight for territory and smuggling routes. Unaccompanied children are especially at risk of being subjected to violence, human trafficking, and sexual predators.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which is responsible for caring for these children while they await immigration court hearings, places these unaccompanied minors in shelters or with sponsors across the country.

Earlier this year, HHS estimated it had placed 200 children in the state of Nebraska with no prior notification. The state did not know where these children were nor whom they were staying with. States have the right to know when the federal government is taking actions which impact their communities.

These children will require resources. Some will require health care and other treatments. Many will seek education including language training in our schools which states are legally required to provide - all of these services will impact our states and local communities.

Because of the effect of these placements on state and local resources, the Nebraska delegation supported our governor, Dave Heinemann, in his request to have this information provided to the State of Nebraska. HHS declined this request.

Because of this, I introduced H.R. 5129 – The UAC State Notification Act – which would require HHS give states advanced notice when unaccompanied minors are to be placed in a state.

It is the companion bill to legislation introduced in the Senate by Senator Johanns. It is also very similar to the bills my colleagues have introduced and will also discuss.

All of these efforts show the importance of this issue. Notifying states of unaccompanied minors is in the best interests of the state, the people who live there, and especially the unaccompanied child.

While we must secure our border, until that happens, we need to look at specific problems we can address. I would think state notification is one area in which we can all agree. Transparency and more information are in everyone's best interests.

I look forward to continuing to work on this issue as we continue to address our many immigration problems because the well being of children and our national security are too important to ignore.

I also appreciate the Subcommittee's efforts and having this very important hearing today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.